



**Testimony Regarding SB284 An Act Increasing The Age From Eight To Eighteen Years For  
An Income Eligible Person To Obtain Medical Assistance Regardless Of Immigration  
Status**

**HUSKY 4 Immigrants Coalition  
March 10, 2022**

Dear Members and Honorable Chairs of the Human Services of Connecticut General Assembly:

We, the HUSKY 4 Immigrants Coalition, stand in support of S.B. No. 284: “An Act Increasing The Age From Eight To Eighteen Years For An Income Eligible Person To Obtain Medical Assistance Regardless Of Immigration Status,” a bill that would prevent 9 year old undocumented children from losing coverage -- given the current, arbitrary age limits set in 2021 by HB 6687-- and help address the lack of access to health coverage, and in turn health care, for the undocumented community in our home state.

The HUSKY 4 Immigrants Coalition is a coalition of immigrants rights organizers, health care advocacy organizers, community leaders, healthcare providers, faith leaders and unions fighting for access to health care and health coverage for Connecticut’s immigrant population.

In Connecticut, our undocumented community is systematically excluded from accessing common forms of health coverage: despite paying nearly half a billion annually in taxes, undocumented immigrants are explicitly ineligible for Medicaid, Medicare and other state and federal coverage programs; cannot purchase qualified health plans on AccessHealthCT; and, private insurers routinely deny applicants without a Social Security numbers absent rationale.

Consequently, the health coverage options for undocumented families are severely limited and most cannot seek the proper health care they need due to the combined factors of their status and inability to pay. With an estimated 120,000 undocumented immigrants calling Connecticut home and an ongoing pandemic fluctuating in cases, this is a massive public health concern. That is why we believe it is imperative for the Human Services Committee to pass SB 284 and ensure all children, regardless of immigration status, have access to quality health coverage.

**Public Health Needs Amidst The COVID Pandemic**



The COVID-19 public health crisis is magnifying the daily and systemic inequities that undocumented communities face. Lack of access to healthcare means that chronic health issues, such as diabetes and heart disease, that could be treated, develop into more serious conditions and become unmanaged. These conditions put our immigrant community at greater risk for worse health outcomes if they become infected with COVID-19. During a pandemic and public health crisis, it is essential that we work to ensure that all of our state's residents have access to healthcare.

During this pandemic, we have seen how we are all interconnected. When one of us can't access healthcare or basic necessities, our whole community is at risk. The only way we are going to overcome the current public health crisis is if we come together to ensure the most vulnerable in our community have the most basic necessities, including the undocumented community. **During a pandemic that has already taken the lives of nearly 1 million nationwide, and over 10,000 in the state, Connecticut has the responsibility to ensure all its residents have health coverage.**

### **Lowering the Uninsured Rate to 0%**

Despite Connecticut boasting a 5% overall uninsured rate, a closer look at insured rates based on immigration status paints a drastically different picture. According to a 2019 analysis of census data by the Migrant Policy Institute, the undocumented community in Connecticut has a devastating 58% uninsured rate due to being excluded from commonly utilized health coverage options. Concerningly, this percentage grew by 6 points from 52% the previous year in 2018, meaning more and more working class folks are losing coverage or cannot access it.

In 2018, the total uninsured individuals in the state was approximately 180,000. Factoring the 58% uninsured rate into the undocumented population results in approximately 65,000 uninsured undocumented individuals. **In turn, 1 in 3 uninsured individuals in the state is undocumented. Thus, if the state of Connecticut wants to have a 0% uninsured rate it must enact policy to insure the undocumented community.**

### **Investing in Primary Care to Save Connecticut Tax Revenue**

Recently, the Lamont Administration signed executive order No. 5, whose partial aim is to have more dollars be invested into primary care from a rate of 5.1% to 10% of overall health expenditures. The goal and thought process is that by treating issues early on and preventing



chronic illnesses from developing, the health system will save money by not needing to perform more intensive, costly treatments and services. As such, expanding HUSKY regardless of immigration status helps achieve said goal.

Currently, a significant percent of uninsured undocumented individuals cannot receive quality, preventative care. As a result, their underlying symptoms and conditions worsen, and it is not until they are severe enough that patients seek help; most often, in the emergency room. Consequently, this causes hospitals and community centers to carry uncompensated care: a mixture between bad debts from people unable to pay, and free charity care. Per OHS, statewide hospital uncompensated care charges totaled \$806 million in FY 2019, a \$41 million increase from the prior year. In turn, this uncompensated care cost is then passed onto the rest of the health system and ultimately to us working class folks. **By expanding HUSKY, we are investing money to save significantly much more in the long run.**

#### **CT Undocumented Taxpayers Contribute Half-a-Billion Annually and Fund HUSKY**

In Connecticut, undocumented immigrants paid an estimated \$335.4 million in federal taxes and \$197.4 million in state and local taxes in 2018, according to a report by the American Immigration Council, "Immigrants in Connecticut." In order to fund HUSKY, the state uses both state funding and receives federal cost-sharing dollars. As undocumented taxpayers, we are directly contributing and funding the state's health programs, yet we ourselves are ineligible due to our immigration status. It is both morally and economically wrong to be exploiting a working class population to fund services for others and exclude those who are funding it with their hard work. **Undocumented immigrants pay for HUSKY, and without our contributions the program would not be funded as well and more people would be uninsured. We have a right to access a program we very much fund.**

#### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, extending HUSKY to all children regardless of status is the best option to expand healthcare access to this low-income population. It will make progress in addressing the uninsured rate in Connecticut, it would allow your constituents to be able to receive the proper care and treatment they deserve, and it would save the state of Connecticut money by decreasing uncompensated care costs by providing preventative care. Additionally, undocumented immigrants pay taxes to fund the program and should receive its benefits. Access to healthcare should not be a commodity only for the wealthy who can afford it. Healthcare is a human right



and no person should be denied the healthcare they need due to their ability to pay or their immigration status.

We support SB 284 and believe it must be passed this year, as a critical next step to ensuring coverage for all. Moving forward, in the following years we hope to continue working together to cover immigrant adults still remaining uninsured and still needing an expansion of HUSKY regardless of immigration status and age. We hope this legislation is voted out of the Human Services Committee.

Thank you for your time,

Jonathan Gonzalez on behalf of the HUSKY 4 Immigrants Coalition (below)

**The HUSKY for Immigrants Coalition is a coalition of immigrants rights organizers, health care advocacy organizers, community leaders, healthcare providers, faith leaders and unions fighting for access to health care and health coverage for CT's immigrant population. Coalition members include: CT Students for a Dream; Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut; The Semilla Collective; Make the Road CT, Hartford Deportation Defense, CT Citizens Action Group; CT Working Families Party; Planned Parenthood Votes! CT, Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF), CT Worker Center, United Action CT, Health Equity Solutions, Neighbor Fund, United for a Safe Inclusive Community Manchester (USIC), the HAVEN Free Clinic, and the Hispanic Federation of CT, and many more organizations and healthcare providers.**